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I. NAPSNet

1. US on DPRK Nuclear Program

Yonhap ("U.S. DELEGATION ENDS VISIT TO N. KOREA ", Seoul, 2008/04/24) reported that a team of US diplomats and nuclear experts returned to Seoul Thursday after a three-day trip to Pyongyang aimed at advancing stalled efforts to rid the DPRK of its nuclear program, a Foreign Ministry spokesman said. The interagency team, led by Sung Kim, director of the U.S. State Department's Office of Korea Affairs, met with the DPRK's top nuclear envoy Kim Kye-gwan and other related officials in Pyongyang to follow up on a provisional agreement between Kim and his American counterpart Christopher Hill in Singapore earlier this month. The outcome of the trip was not made public immediately.

Yonhap ("CONGRESS WARNS NON-COOPERATION ON 6PT ", Washington, 2008/04/24) reported that Senior US House leaders warned the delayed briefing on the alleged DPRK-Syria nuclear ties has "made it very difficult" for the administration to move forward on the six-party Korean denuclearization talks. Coming out of what was the first set of briefing to the full House intelligence committee, Rep. Peter Hoekstra, the ranking member, also said there would have to be "good, clear, verifiable information" from countries involved before the administration can remove the DPRK from the list of US terrorism-sponsoring states.

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2. Alleged DPRK-Syrian Nuclear Cooperation

Washington Post (Robin Wright, "N. KOREANS TAPED AT SYRIAN REACTOR", Washington, 2008/04/24) reported that a video taken inside a secret Syrian facility last summer convinced the Israeli government and the Bush administration that the DPRK was helping to construct a reactor similar to one that produces plutonium for the DPRK's nuclear arsenal, according to senior US officials who said it would be shared with lawmakers today. The officials said the video of the remote site, code-named Al Kibar by the Syrians, shows North Koreans inside. Sources familiar with the video say it also shows that the Syrian reactor core's design is the same as that of the DPRK reactor at Yongbyon, including a virtually identical configuration and number of holes for fuel rods. It shows "remarkable resemblances inside and out to Yongbyon," a U.S. intelligence official said.

Reuters (Samia Nakhoul, "SYRIA DENIES U.S. ACCUSATION OVER NUCLEAR REACTOR ", London, 2008/04/24) reported that Syria on Thursday dismissed U.S. accusations that the DPRK was helping it build a nuclear reactor that could produce plutonium. Syria's ambassador to Britain, Sami al-Khiyami, told Reuters that the accusation, which President George W. Bush's administration was expected to lay out to lawmakers, was to put pressure on the DPRK in talks about Pyongyang's nuclear program. "This has nothing to do with North Korea and Syria. They just want to exert more pressure on North Korea. This is why they are coming up with this story," Khiyami said. "The cooperation between North Korea and Syria has nothing to do with (building) a nuclear facility. Cooperation is mainly economic.

Agence France-Presse ("US ENVOY HILL SAYS NKOREA, SYRIA NOT COOPERATING NOW", Tokyo, 2008/04/25) reported that US chief nuclear negotiator Christopher Hill said the DPRK and Syria were no longer cooperating in nuclear work. "It is the judgement of the United States that there is not an ongoing cooperation with Syria in this area," Hill told reporters in footage broadcast Friday on Japanese television. "We will deal with this issue as we do with many other issues in the six parties," Hill said.

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3. Inter-Korean Relations

Joongang Ilbo ("IRRITATED NORTH SKIPS MAY DAY EVENT", 2008/04/24) reported that the DPRK will boycott a joint May Day festival to express its annoyance at Seoul, ROK organizers said yesterday. Since 2001, labor groups from both Koreas have marked the May 1 anniversary together with a soccer exhibition, a joint visit of historic sites, seminars and meetings. The event, mostly held in the DPRK, has been one of the symbols of rapprochement since the first summit between leaders of the two Koreas in June 2000. During talks at Mount Kumgang on April 10-11, however, the DPRK told a ROK delegation of the two umbrella labor unions that it had decided not to hold this year's event, said Kim Yeong-je, chief of the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions' unification bureau.

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4. DPRK-Japan Relations

Xinhua ("DPRK ACCUSES JAPAN OF PLOTTING OVERSEAS EXPANSION", 2008/04/24) reported that a newly released report by the Defense Ministry of Japan reveals its ambition for overseas expansion, a leading state-run newspaper of the DPRK claimed. The report on "the strategic prospect of East Asia for 2008" expressed uneasiness at the DPRK's nuclear tests and missile tests, said a commentary carried by the Rodong Sinmun newspaper. The report aimed to make preemptive attacks on other countries under the "absurd pretext" of someone's "threat" and help Japan realize its ambition for overseas expansion at any cost, the commentary claimed. Japan was rounding off "the preparations for mounting preemptive attacks for aggression in a bid to conquer not only Northeast Asia but the rest of the world," the commentary claimed.

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5. DPRK on Abductions

Yonhap ("N. KOREA DENIES REPORT OF ABDUCTION OF WOMEN IN 1970S ", Paris, 2008/04/24) reported that the DPRK said a French daily's report that the DPRK abducted and held at least 28 foreign women hostage, including three French, in the 1970s, is a "fabrication." On Wednesday, Le Figaro alleged the DPRK abducted the women to use them to teach foreign languages to DPRK spies. In response to the report, an official at the DPRK mission in Paris said by phone, "There is no reason at all for us to kidnap French women or any other country's women." The official said on condition of anonymity, "They just point a finger at us whenever some people are missing since the Japanese have clung to this issue."

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6. US-ROK Security Alliance

Joongang Ilbo ("KOREA POISED TO UPGRADE FROM U.S.", 2008/04/24) reported that the U.S. House is expected to approve a bill next week that would upgrade the ROK's status when it buys arms from the United States. H.R. 5443, introduced in February, proposed giving the ROK the same status as Australia, New Zealand, Japan and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization when purchasing weapons from the US under laws regulating foreign military sales. This would allow sales of greater monetary value without any notification of Congress. Even if congressional notification is needed, the bill shortens the deliberation period.

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7. US-ROK Trade Relations

Joongang Ilbo (Lee Min-a , "TENSIONS PERCOLATE DURING FTA MEETING ", 2008/04/24) reported that calling the negotiations "rough and ready," Sohn Hak-kyu told President Lee Myung-bak that the agreement to resume imports of U.S. beef made it more difficult for him to support the rest of the free trade bill that the ROK agreed to with the United States. The leader of the biggest opposition contingent, the United Democratic Party, said he has no objections to Lee' call to ratify the pending free trade agreement bill before the 2008 National Assembly begins next month, but only if follow-up measures on opening the beef market are guaranteed. "I'm in a difficult situation of trying to tell livestock farmers why we have to ratify these bills," said Sohn. "We need follow up policies that can satisfy the industries that will be hurt [if we open the beef market]."

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8. Japan SDF Role

Kyodo ("LDP EYEING FALL SUBMISSION OF BILL ON PERMANENT SDF DISPATCH LAW", Tokyo, 2008/04/24) reported that the ruling Liberal Democratic Party has given up on a plan to submit a bill during the current session of the Diet for a permanent law to authorize the overseas dispatch of defense troops but will aim to submit it in the next extraordinary session expected to convene this fall, a veteran LDP lawmaker said. Taku Yamasaki, head of the LDP research committee on foreign policy, made the remarks during a meeting of an LDP project team that is seeking to enact the law to enable the dispatch of Self-Defense Forces troops overseas whenever necessary. Such dispatches are currently restricted under the war-renouncing Constitution.

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9. US Military in Japan

Associated Press (Joseph Coleman, "US MARINE CHARGED WITH RAPE IN JAPAN", Tokyo, 2008/04/25) reported that U.S. forces in Japan have charged a Marine with raping a 14-year-old girl in Okinawa, the Marines said Friday. No date was set for the court-martial.

Kyodo ("LDP PANEL PROPOSES SDF OFFICER AS AIDE TO PREMIER ", Tokyo, 2008/04/24) reported that a governing party panel on Defense Ministry reforms endorsed a set of proposals Thursday featuring the idea of appointing a Self-Defense Forces officer as an aide to the prime minister in a bid to strengthen the power of uniformed officers in the ministry. The subcommittee under the Liberal Democratic Party's Research Commission on Security also proposed to upgrade the status of the chief of the ministry's Joint Staff Office and set up a command center under the SDF chief so the JSO chief can directly operate an SDF unit without going through the chiefs of the ground, maritime and air self-defense forces.

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10. Cross Strait Relations

Kyodo ("U.S. OFFICIALS ATTEND KEY TAIWAN MILITARY EXERCISE FOR THE 1ST TIME ", Taipei, 2008/04/24) reported that US officials attended for the first time recent military exercises in Taiwan designed to test the island's preparedness in dealing with a full-blown attack by the PRC, Taiwan's National Security Council announced. The announcement in a press release issued by Taiwan's Office of the President followed media reports Thursday that Stephen Young, director of the American Institute in Taiwan, the de facto U.S. embassy in the absence of official U.S.-Taiwan ties, participated in an evacuation drill Tuesday as part of the exercises by riding in a Taiwanese armored personnel carrier.

Agence France-Presse ("TAIWAN'S INCOMING CHINA NEGOTIATOR ARRIVES IN SHANGHAI ", Shanghai, 2008/04/24) reported that Taiwan's incoming top negotiator with the PRC arrived in Shanghai Thursday amid hopes of improved trade and political ties between the traditional rivals. Chiang Pin-kun met Taiwanese business leaders based here on the first leg of a five-day trip, his office said. "Taiwan should not only discuss free-trade agreements with Southeast Asian countries, but will eventually do the same with the mainland," Chiang said in a speech to Taiwanese business people in Shanghai.

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11. Tibet Unrest

The Associated Press (Christopher Bodeen, "RIOT-SCARRED TIBET REOPENS TO CHINESE TOUR GROUPS ", Beijing, 2008/04/24) reported that the PRC is welcoming domestic tour groups back to riot-hit Tibet, an official news report said Thursday, but there remains no word on when foreign tourists will be allowed to return. Four groups of PRC visitors are expected to arrive in the Himalayan region through Tuesday, the Xinhua News Agency said. The report quoted Zhanor, the

regional deputy tourism director, as saying he did not know when the region would reopen to foreign tourists, who have been banned since violent anti-government riots broke out in the capital, Lhasa, on March 14.

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12. PRC African Diplomacy

The News (T. Michael Johnny, "AFRICA: CHINA EARMARKS U.S.\$5 BILLION FOR FOOD PRODUCTION ON CONTINENT", 2008/04/24) reported that a visiting PRC delegation headed by the Chief Executive Officer of the PRC-Africa Development Fund says about 5 billion United States dollars have been earmarked for the production of food and cash crops in Liberia and other African countries over a 50-year period. Mr. Chi Jianxin, at a head of a PRC delegation, is in the country to explore investment opportunities in the agricultural sector. Chi said his company has the financial capacity and expertise to develop and stabilize the food situation in Liberia "particularly in rice production and other cash crops".

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13. Sino-French Relations

Agence France-Presse (Joelle Garrus , "CHINA, FRANCE SEEK TO EASE TENSIONS AT HIGH-LEVEL TALKS ", Beijing, 2008/04/24) reported that the PRC called on France Thursday to cooperate to bring troubled relations back on track as the two sides held high-level talks amid tensions over Tibet and the Paris Olympic torch protests. President Hu Jintao, in a meeting with French Senate leader Christian Poncelet, complained about raucous demonstrations against the PRC's control of Tibet that marred the Paris leg of the Olympic torch relay in early April. "A series of unfriendly things towards the Chinese people happened in Paris recently, especially when the Olympic torch relay visited Paris," Hu was quoted by state-run television as telling Poncelet. "We hope the French side will work with China to overcome the impact of those disturbances," Hu reportedly said, adding that the PRC valued relations with France.

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14. PRC Olympics

The New York Times (Andrew Jacobs, "BRACING FOR GAMES, CHINA SETS RULES THAT COMPLICATE LIFE FOR FOREIGNERS", Beijing, 2008/04/24) reported that even as Beijing is promising to welcome 1.5 million visitors to the Olympic Games, public security officials are tightening controls over daily life and introducing visa restrictions that are causing anxiety among the 250,000 foreigners who have settled here in recent years. The visa rules, which were introduced last week with little explanation, restrict many visitors to 30-day stays, replacing flexible, multiple-entry visas that had allowed people to remain for up to a year. The new rules make it harder for foreigners to live and work in Beijing without applying for residency permits, which can be difficult to obtain. "I can't begin to explain how serious this is going to be," said Richard Vuylsteke, president of the American Chamber of Commerce in Hong Kong. "A barrier like this is going to have a real ripple effect on business."

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15. PRC Infrastructure

The Los Angeles Times (Don Lee, "NEW ROADS TAKE CHINESE NOWHERE FAST", Chongqing, 2008/04/23) reported that the PRC has been throwing down pavement and asphalt at a breakneck speed, and few cities are as proud of all the new roads as Chongqing, the PRC's largest metropolis with 32 million people. More than 6,300 miles of streets, highways and tunnels have been built in this hilly western PRC city in the last decade -- enough to get from Los Angeles to Juneau, Alaska, and back. The improvements are testament to the impressive infrastructure supporting the nation's booming economy. But as fast as construction workers build the roads, the concrete and asphalt is being destroyed -- carved up by a chronic assault from overloaded trucks. The result is 24-hour construction zones and trouble for the environment, the economy and the people living near the highways and byways.

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II. ROK Report

16. Alleged DPRK-Syria Cooperation

Maeil Shinmun ("DPRK DISCLOSED NUCLEAR CONNECTION WITH SYRIA", 2008/04/25) wrote in an editorial that although there are different analyses on the background of the complete disclosure of nuclear collaboration between DPRK and Syria, it is predicted to have a negative influence on the six-party talks. If the DPRK continues its denial concerning the nuclear work, it will lose the trust of the global society and take responsibilities for all the result at the same time.

Yonhap News ("DPRK'S NUCLEAR PROLIFERATION SHOULD NOT BE REPEATED", 2008/04/25) wrote that there is no other option for the DPRK but only to frankly admit its nuclear collaboration with Syria and manifest its volition to no longer proliferate nuclear. It is very fortunate that the US has recently made progress in the negotiation on a practical level by agreeing to cooperate in the verification of its nuclear program. I sincerely hope that the DPRK dispels doubts through this opportunity. The US administration and Congress also need more patience in order for the six-party talks—the only peaceful solution to DPRK nuclear—to have an easy cruise.

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